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## LITERARY GLEANINGS.

BY DR. A. NEUBAUER.

## XII.

## The Hebrew Bible in Shorthand Writing.

No mediæval literature contains so many abbreviations as the Jewish in the Hebrew commentaries on the Bible, and the Talmudic treatises, and more especially in the stupendous literature of the casuistic Responsa. These abbreviations may be counted by the thousand, and they are moreover increased even now by writers who still use the Rabbinical language. Attempts to solve these abbreviations have been made since Buxtorf in his *De Abbreviaturis Hebraicis*, etc., Basel, 1640, up to the present time by the Abbé Perreau of Parma in his *1,700 Abbreviature e sigle* (Parma, 1882), Autografia in 60 copies. These abbreviated forms consist chiefly of words of which the initial letters only are given; *e.g.*, to take the most common instances, the expression אֲעֵפִי, which represents the words אֲעֵלָּהּ פִּי, "although," and בִּהָ, which means בֵּרוּךְ הוּא, "blessed be God." But the greatest difficulty is felt in the solution of proper names. Let us take for instance a very frequent one, which is רַבֵּן, of which the רַ represents always the word Rabbi, the other three letters, viz., אֶבֶן may be Abraham ben (son of) Nathan, but also son of Nahman, of Nissim, or any other whose name begins with the letter *n*, not to speak of the fact that the א (Abraham) may represent names like Ahron, Elijah, Aryeh, and so on. It was economy of time and of paper which was the cause of these numerous abbreviations. In early manuscripts of the Talmud literature, we find fewer abridged forms of names and other expressions, but it is well known that disciples of the Talmud schools in Babylonia marked with initial letters the subjects which were taught there; these marks are usually called סִימָן, which represents the Greek word σημείον. When the Talmud was written down these mnemonic letters disappeared, but traces of them have remained in manuscripts of the Talmud, many of which were faithfully reproduced in the editions. The manuscripts, however, vary for these mnemonical letters. With this mode of putting down what the schools had taught, a Rabbi could carry in his pocket the whole Talmud teaching, as concerns the *Halakhah*, without noting down the detailed discussions; those were left to memory, with which the Eastern nations, and more

especially those of the Semitic race, are gifted. Nowadays there are Jewish boys who know by heart the Hebrew Pentateuch, with the Aramaic translation, the Psalms, the Prophetic Lessons, the Five Scrolls, and frequently with the commentary of Rashi. There are many young and old rabbis who know the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud in such a way that they will not only hit upon the tractate and the folio where a passage occurs, but also recite the whole folio with the preceding or following passage. The same is the case with the Arabs for the Korān and the important commentators, such as Baidhawi, Zamakshari, as well as for medical and astronomical books. The Rig Veda, and perhaps all the Vedas, were kept by memory for a long time.

Was the Bible or any part of it written in shorthand writing? This question has never been asked by any of the numerous Bible critics. Indeed, if that were the case, many emendations proposed by them could perhaps be explained by the tachygraphical method of writing. Traces of such short writing are mentioned in the Talmudic literature by the word נֹטָרִיקוֹן, *νοταρικόν*, *notaricum*, of which the Greek and the Latin forms are not found in lexicons, but the form is certain by the many quotations in the Talmudic literature except in the Targum and the Tosefta (see Samuel Krauss' able essay, with the title of *Zur griechischen und lateinischen Lexicographie aus jüdischen Quellen*, in the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, II. 3 and 4, p. 515), and it means shorthand writing. There are, however, two kinds of it in classical times : 1. The Roman one, where a letter represents a whole word ; 2, The Greek, where the letters are shortened. Herr Krauss (*loc. cit.*, p. 513) is of opinion, and we agree with him, that the Rabbis have accepted the Roman method of shorthand writing. His proofs are the following : 1, The passage in the *Mishnah* (Jomá, III. 10), where it is said that the pious Helena, Queen of Adiabene, had made for the temple at Jerusalem a golden plate, on which the law for adultery (Numbers vi. 1 to 21) was engraved (אָף הָיָא עֲשֵׂתָהּ טַבְלָא שֶׁל זֶהָב) (שְׁפָרְשָׁת סוּטָה כְּתוּבָה עֲלֶיהָ). 2, Simeon ben Laqish, in the name of Jannai (about 230 A. D.) adds (B. T. *Gittin*, fol. 60<sup>a</sup>) בֵּית בִּאֲלָה, which Rashi rightly explains by רֵאשִׁי הַחִיבוֹת, *i.e.*, the initial letters of the words.

Another trace of short writing in the Talmud is to be found in the saying of R. Simeon, who says that by writing on the Sabbath the two Alephs (אָא) of the word אֶזְרוֹךְ (Isaiah xlv. 5) the Sabbath is profaned (for the word גִּלְטוּרִי which occurs in this passage see S. Krauss, *loc. cit.* p. 513). The shorthand form seems to be mentioned also in the Pal. Talmud (*Megillah*, fol. 73<sup>a</sup>, col. 2, l. 32), where it is said that the scroll of Esther may be written for the Synagogue use

in shorthand writing (שהיתה כתוב גיגנוטון; see Krauss, *loc. cit.*, p. 514, who solves the enigmatic word גיגנוטון with the Latin *cognitum*, i.e., גונגנוטון; not to be found in that sense. Might not גיגנוטון represent a possible popular form γιγνωτων from γιγνωσκαω? Perhaps after all, the reading of דיגלטון—διγλοστον, "in two languages," is preferable. See Dr. Blau's able monograph, which has just appeared (p. 90) with the title of *Zur Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift*. Herr Krauss adduces the passage in the Midrash *Tillim* (iii. 3; B. T. *Shabbath*, fol. 105<sup>a</sup>), where it is said concerning the word נמרצת (1 Kings ii. 8), as follows : מהו נמרצת נוטריקון נ נואף מ מואבי ר רוצה צ צורו ת תועבה.

Even Biblical words were explained by the system of shorthand writing. This instance shows clearly the application of the Roman method. Perhaps also the Midrashic explanation of the name אברהם=אברם גוים (Gen. xvii. 5) is found. In short the mention of *notaricon* is found in the Mishnah, the two Gemaras, the Sifrê, the Mekhilta, and frequently the Midrashim, but not in the Tosefta and in the Targum (Krauss, *l. c.*, p. 515).

But with all the minute researches of Dr. Krauss, there is no definite instance in which the Jews accepted the Roman method of shorthand writing. Indeed, two fragments of Bible text found lately in Egypt and acquired by the Bodleian Library, show a different kind of shorthand writing. The one is in MS. Hebrew d. 39, fol. 1 (catalogue No. 2608, 1), containing Genesis xxvi. 11 to xxix. 15, much obliterated, and belonging, perhaps, to the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century; there are a few vowels-points, and accents. The second is in MS. Hebrew e. 30, containing, α, Isaiah v. 8 to ix. 8, fol. 48 (catalogue, No. 2,604, 11); β, Isaiah xlv. 4 to xlviii. 11, most likely written in the twelfth century on vellum 4to, 2 columns. α begins as follows :—

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|-------|--|
| 8     | הוּ בַּ תַּעֲהֵ שֶׁ ת ב                |
| 9     | בִּאֲנִי אֵל בֶּ ל בִּ אֲוִי           |
| vi. 1 | בִּשְׁנַת־מֵ ו יֵשׁ פֶּר נִשׁ לֵ לָהּ  |
| 2     | שִׁרְפִּים מִי מִ שְׁפָשְׁלָה י נִתָּם |
| 3     | וּקְרָא זֶן מִ תְּשֻׁדָּה לָהּ         |
| 4     | אֶ קָבַ בִּ מִי                        |
| 24    | בְּחַצִּים בֶּ שֶׁ בִּשְׁמִי וִ שֶׁ    |
| 25    | ו כָּל רֹדֵ יַעֲבֹשׁ אֶ וְיִלְקָמָה    |

We see that each verse begins with the full words of the text, but for the rest I have not succeeded in finding out the method of the

abbreviations, and the use of them; certainly it is too complicated for use in primary schools. Perhaps when the photographic facsimiles appear in the catalogue of newly acquired MSS. in the Bodleian Library, one of the savants may find out this mystery. Anyhow, in this shorthand writing Isaiah would fill only twenty-six leaves. Possibly this kind of shorthand writing might explain what Maqrizi means by saying that a sect in Egypt called the Fayyumites (of Fayyum) explain the Law in a sense as if the letters of which it is composed were abbreviations. Sylvestre de Sacy explains this by *notaricon*. He says in his *Chrestomathie Arabe*, t. I. (2nd edition), p. 356, note 82, "Il paroît que Makrizi veut dire qu' Abou-Saïd (who cannot be identical with the famous Saadyah Gaon) interprétait la loi par cette espèce de cabale que les juifs nomment *Notaricon*. Les Arabes d'Afrique appellent les abréviations *הרוף מקבוע*, au lieu que les Orientaux les nomment *רום הרוף*, à l'imitation des juifs, qui les appellent *ראשי תיבות*." Such mysterious letters are found also at the beginning of some Suras of the Qorân, which are taken by commentators as abbreviations. Erpenius, indeed, says of them in his grammar, as quoted by De Sacy, *Ubi tamen aliquam conjecturæ libertatem sibi permittunt; statuentes singulis seorsum literis denotari aliquid peculiare, quare et literas separatas et singulares appellant*.

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#### THE WRITINGS OF PERLES.

In addition to the works enumerated by Professor Bacher in his excellent biography (*supra*, pp. 1-23), I would mention the following:—

1. *Analekten* in Kobak's *Jeshurun* (German section iii., 1859, pp. 38-40. On page 44 of the same part is a review, probably by Dr. Güdemann, of Perles' "*Meletemata Peschithonia*").
2. *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge* delivered in Baja (1859), and similar addresses delivered in Posen (1864).

I believe, too, that he published a sermon against mixed marriages.

S. J. HALBERSTAM.